

YCCCART 2024/Y7

Church of St. John the Baptist, Churchill

Part 2: Vestry, Porch and Outside the Church

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General Editor: Vince Russett



St John the Baptist, Churchill, 2024.

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Introduction

Over the past few years because of covid and other factors YCCCART members have undertaken documentary and photographic research into several local churches. Reports (available online at www.ycccart.co.uk) have been produced on churches at Puxton, Kenn, Kingston Seymour, Yatton and Wick St Lawrence. This is the second report on St John the Baptist, Churchill. The first covered the Aisles, Nave and Chancel.

Acknowledgement

In respect of the Church of St John the Baptist, Churchill. I would like to thank the following: Tricia Avery, churchwarden, for taking time to let us enter the church and for information; YCCCART members John Wilcox, David Long and Keith Taylor for photographs and invaluable assistance and Vince Russett for inspiring this project, assistance, and final editing.

Site Location



Fig 1: Location.

The church is off Church Lane Churchill. The National Grid Reference is ST 43729 60239.

The church is closed but there are telephone numbers on the notice board should entry be required.

Historical & Archaeological Context

Early archaeology

Although Churchill contains both the large hill fort at Dolebury, and a smaller earthwork 'Dinghurst Camp', which has its inside almost completely quarried away, leaving the external bank (Richards, C. *pers comm*), little else of prehistoric date

(unless the enigmatic double-banked earthwork on Windmill Hill (North Somerset HER MNS395) be so) is known: similarly, Roman sites are confined to a coin hoard from a cave and a single coin find from Sandford Hill (North Somerset HER). Given the density of prehistoric and Roman occupation in the area generally, this probably results from the lack of any formal parish survey, and the consequent lack of academic interest and fieldwork in the parish.

Churchill does not seem to be referred to in national sources until 1201 (Ekwall 1981), although it was clearly part of the great manor of Banwell: the 1068 charter bounds of that manor include at least three 'points' (*Cyng Roda*, now King Road; *Wrinnaest Straeme* (the East Wrinn, now part of the Congresbury Yeo SE of Iwood; *Hyls Broc*, now the Hunter's Brook, running from the *Eaa Willme* (the large spring) at Springhead Farm, south of the Bath Road) which are on the north-east section of the modern Churchill boundary. The charter also includes '*eall abutan Losa Leh*' (all around ?Mendip Lodge Wood as the modern boundary runs) and then '*swa west on thone Combe...to Bibridcge.*' (along the combe west to the place by the bridge). The southeastern areas on this boundary are confirmed by the 904 charter of Wrington. (Neale 1969; Rippon 2006).

Its placename seems to be from *OE* cirichyll = 'hill with a church', although the involvement of the *OBrit* 'cruc' = 'hill' cannot be ignored: the generally flatter topography of Churchill compared to the adjacent Mendip should rule this out; however, the inclusion of the spectacular hill fort of Dolebury within the parish, visibly on a 'hill', may reinforce the idea (Ekwall, *ibid*).

Thorn and Thorn (1980) have argued that the 5.5 hides of 'Ralph Crooked hands' in Domesday were Churchill and Stock, which may be the earliest record of what later became the parish.

The field to the north of the parish church is referred to in the North Somerset HER as a possible deserted medieval settlement (MNS384). There is however no evidence for this and it may have been a WW2 site.

Later history

Churchill is not listed in Domesday since it was at the time part of the vast manor of Banwell and there is uncertainty about the origins of the church.

Hodges (1994) refers to a chapel on the site in 1180s, which may have been built by the Augustine canons of Bruton Priory, and that in 1180 Robert, Chaplain of Churchill was presented by the Prior and Cannons of Bruton Priory. Robert is the first name on the Vicars Chaplains and Curates list on the wall in the south aisle of the church. (See page 22).

The parish was, according to Hodges, therefore formed in the 12th century

Knight (1915), records that the first mention of Churchill is in 'an award made in 1231, by Bishop Jocelyn, concerning the chapel of Churchill (Bruton Cartulary. Deed 114). The same document names Robert Fitzpayne and John de la Stocke as local landowners of the period. A Roger Fitzpayne is mentioned in an account of an action at law, dated 1276' concerning a house or holding in Churchill.'

Until 1447 a Fitzpayne owned a part of the parish when John Austell sold to John Tretheke the manor which Alice Beaumont, wife of John Fitzpayne, held for her life.

John Tretheke passed the property to a daughter, and from her to her husband, Sir Nicholas St. Lowe.

Nicholas was succeeded by his son Sir John St. Lo, whose son Sir William sold to Ralph Jenyns the manors of Puxton, Churchill and Edingworth.

Jenyns is depicted on the brass which lies in the south aisle of the church.

Ralph was the grandfather of Sarah first Duchess of Marlborough who was an ancestor of the famous Sir Winston Churchill.

Ralph Jenyns's great-grandson Richard sold Churchill in 1652 to John Churchill, who was knighted in 1670, made Recorder of Bristol in 1682, created Master of the Rolls and elected Member of Parliament for Bristol in 1685.

John Churchill died in 1685 and the estate was sold out of the family.

Banwell Priory (renamed Abbey) was surrendered to King Henry VIII in 1539 upon the dissolution of the monasteries. The church of St John, with Banwell and Puxton, was given to the Bishop of Bristol, in whose patronage it remains.

The Churchill Commonwealth curate was ejected from his living in 1663 and replaced by an Anglican.

During the 1750s the Churchill vicar held several livings and so for less than £16 per year he placed a curate at Churchill.

In 1960 the parish was united with part of Winscombe parish (Sandford) and with Burrington in 1978. The parish was then spilt again in the late 1990's to be Churchill and Langford. Then in 2024 Churchill Parish moved into the Benefice of Winscombe and Sandford with Churchill.

Saint John the Baptist church was largely rebuilt in the C14 and C15 centuries and restored 1879-80 by Ewan Christian.

The church is a Grade 1 Listed Building.

Plan of the Church

Not to scale.

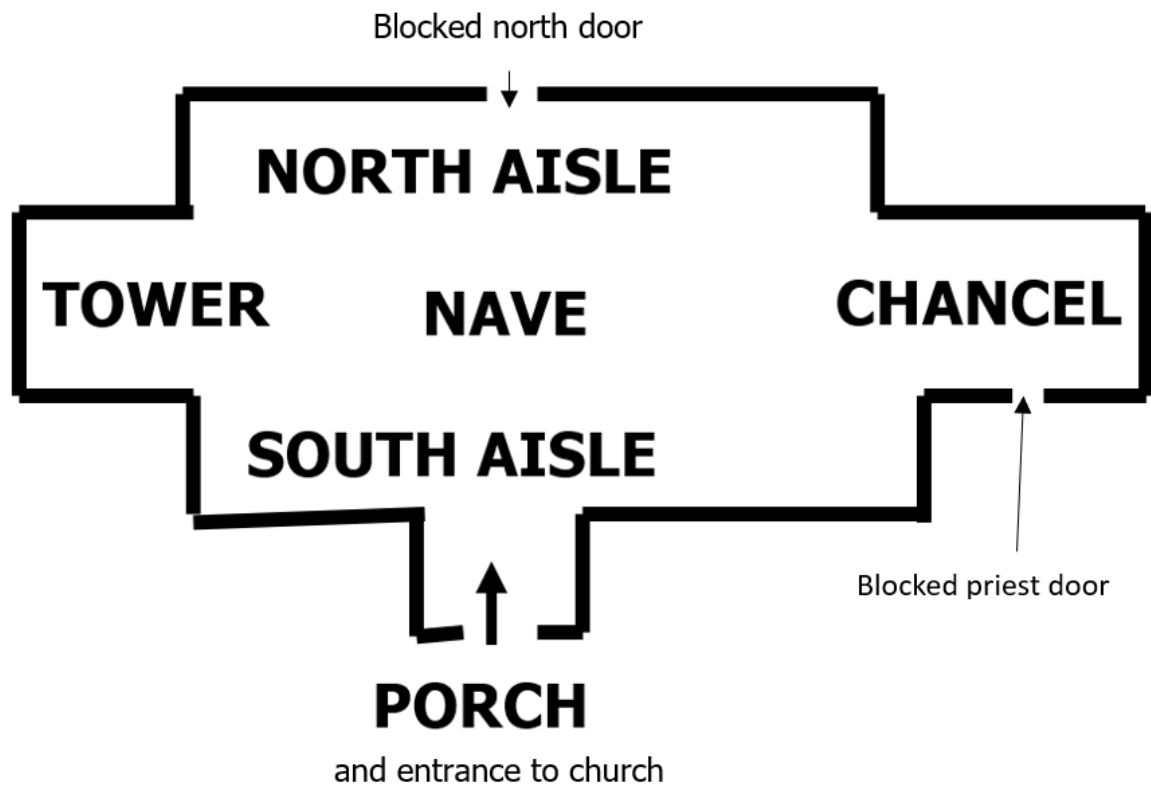


Fig 2. Plan of the church.

THE VESTRY

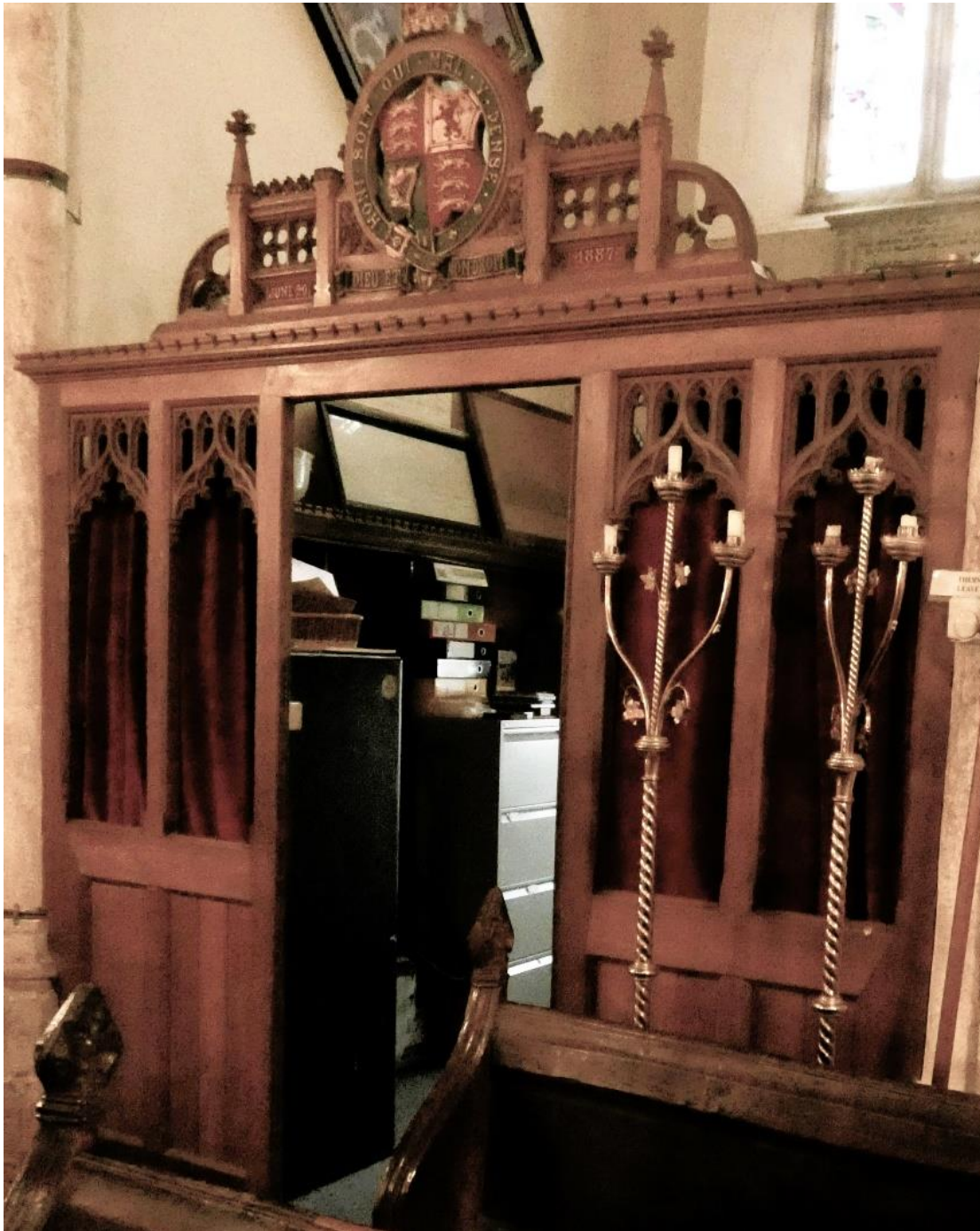


Fig 3: Entrance to the tower, now the vestry.



St. John's Church Churchill

Fig 4: The wooden screen entrance to the inside of the tower.

The wooden screen was erected to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.



Fig 5: Close up of screen.



Fig 6: The west window.

TO THE MEMORY OF ROBERT BLAKE OF CHURCHILL SON OF THE LATE
 AGED 86 YEARS ALSO OF ANNE THEIR INFANT DAUGHTER ALSO OF THE
 MARCH 7 1832 AGED 34 YEARS FRANCES ST ALBYN

ROGER AND JANE BLAKE OF STOWAY HE DIED MARCH 2 1836 AGED
 REV^D ROBERT BLAKE M A THEIR SON WHO DIED JUNE 10 1820 AGED
 DAUGHTER DIED JANUARY 9 1864 AGED 75 YEARS ELIZABETH BLAKE

86 YEARS ALSO OF FRANCES HIS WIFE WHO DIED OCTOBER 31 1848
 32 YEARS ALSO OF THE REV^D JOHN BLAKE B C L THEIR SON WHO
 THEIR DAUGHTER DIED APRIL 4 1864 AGED 72 YEARS

Fig 7: Text at the bottom of the window. Top is left, middle in centre and bottom is right.

It reads:

TO THE MEMORY OF ROBERT BLAKE OF CHURCHILL SON OF THE LATE / ROGER AND
 JANE BLAKE OF STOWAY HE DIED MARCH 2 1836 AGED / 86 YEARS ALSO OF
 FRANCES HIS WIFE WHO DIED OCTOBER 31 1848 AGED / 86* YEARS ALSO OF
 ANNE THEIR INFANT DAUGHTER ALSO OF THE / REV^D ROBERT BLAKE M A THEIR
 SON WHO DIED JUNE 10 1820 AGED / 32 YEARS ALSO OF THE REV^D JOHN BLAKE B
 C L THEIR SON WHO / (DIED) MARCH 7 1832 AGED 34 YEARS FRANCIS ST ALBYN
 THEIR / DAUGHTER DIED JANUARY 9 1864 AGED 75 YEARS ELIZABETH BLAKE/
 THEIR DAUGHTER DIED APRIL 4 1864 AGED 72 YEARS

**Ancestry (www.ancestry.co.uk) records show that Frances died aged 88.*



Fig 8: Vestry – west wall

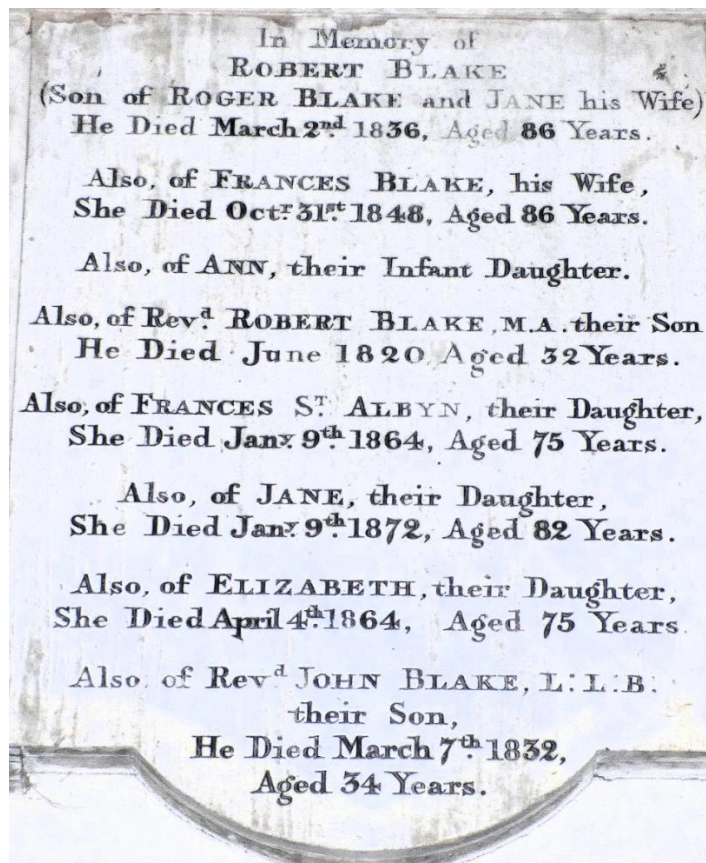


Fig 9: Plaque under west window.

On the plaque shown on page 10 **ELIZABETH** is recorded as dying at the age of 72 not 75.

72 is the age given on the Somerset Burial Record.

JANE, who died in 1872, is not recorded on the page 10 plaque.



Fig 10: Board right of west window

This reads:

THE BLAKE FAMILY
LONG RESIDENT IN THIS
VILLAGE WHOSE DEATHS
ARE ABOVE RECORDED ARE
BURIED IN THE CHURCHYARD
OF NETHER STOWEY
AND THE WEST WINDOW
WAS HERE PLACED IN
GRATEFUL MEMORY BY
THOMAS SHORLAND
OF THIS PARISH 1872



Fig 11: North wall of vestry.

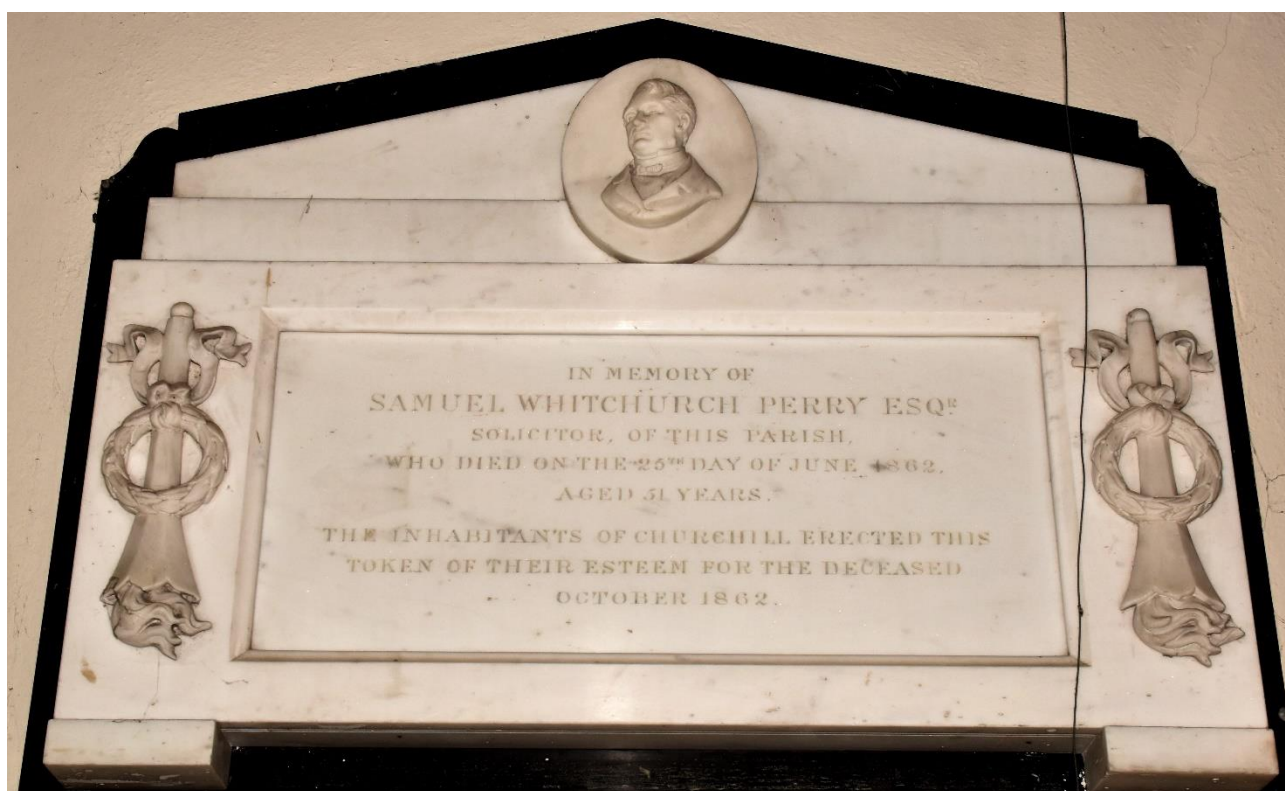


Fig 12: Plaque on north wall.

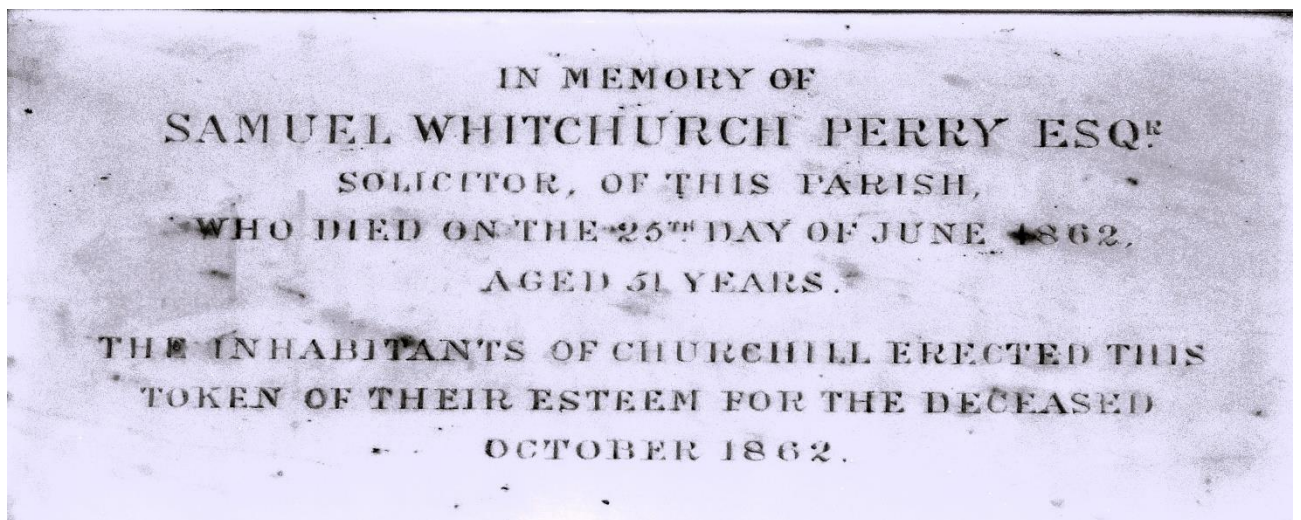


Fig 13: Close up of plaque.



Fig 14: The fan vault and bell access hatch, tower ceiling.



Fig 15: South wall.



Fig 16: Royal Coat of Arms.

The Royal Coat of Arms mark the Monarch's position as Head of the Church of England.

It was the accepted practise to erect them in churches after the Restoration in 1660. The Churchill example is dated 1663 and is the Arms of King Charles II (1630 to 1685) who was King of Scotland from 1649 until 1651 and King of England, Scotland, and Ireland from the 1660 Restoration of the monarchy until his death in 1685.

Through neglect or destruction Victorian restorations the majority have been lost and only about 20% of churches now have them.

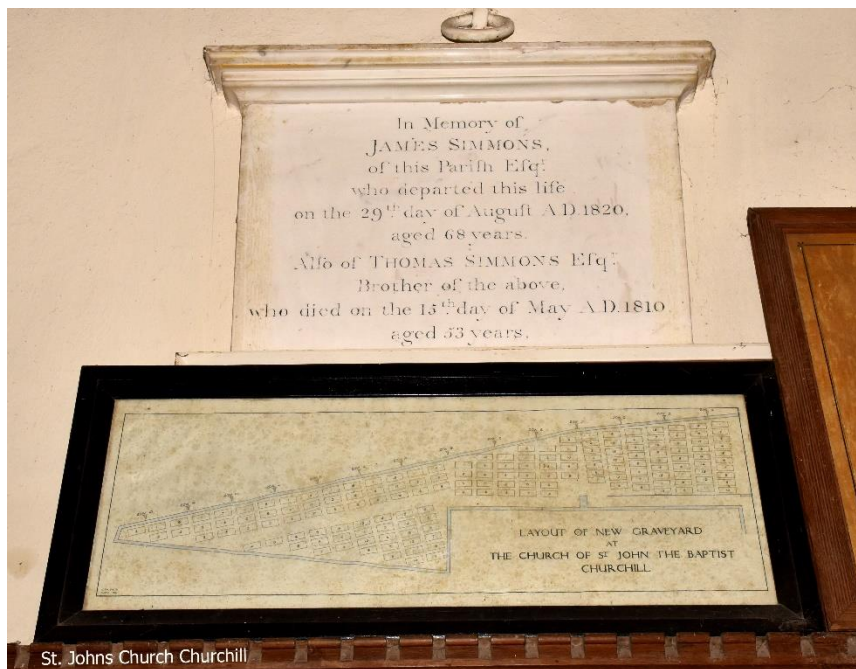


Fig 17: Plaque on south wall and below a map of the graveyard.

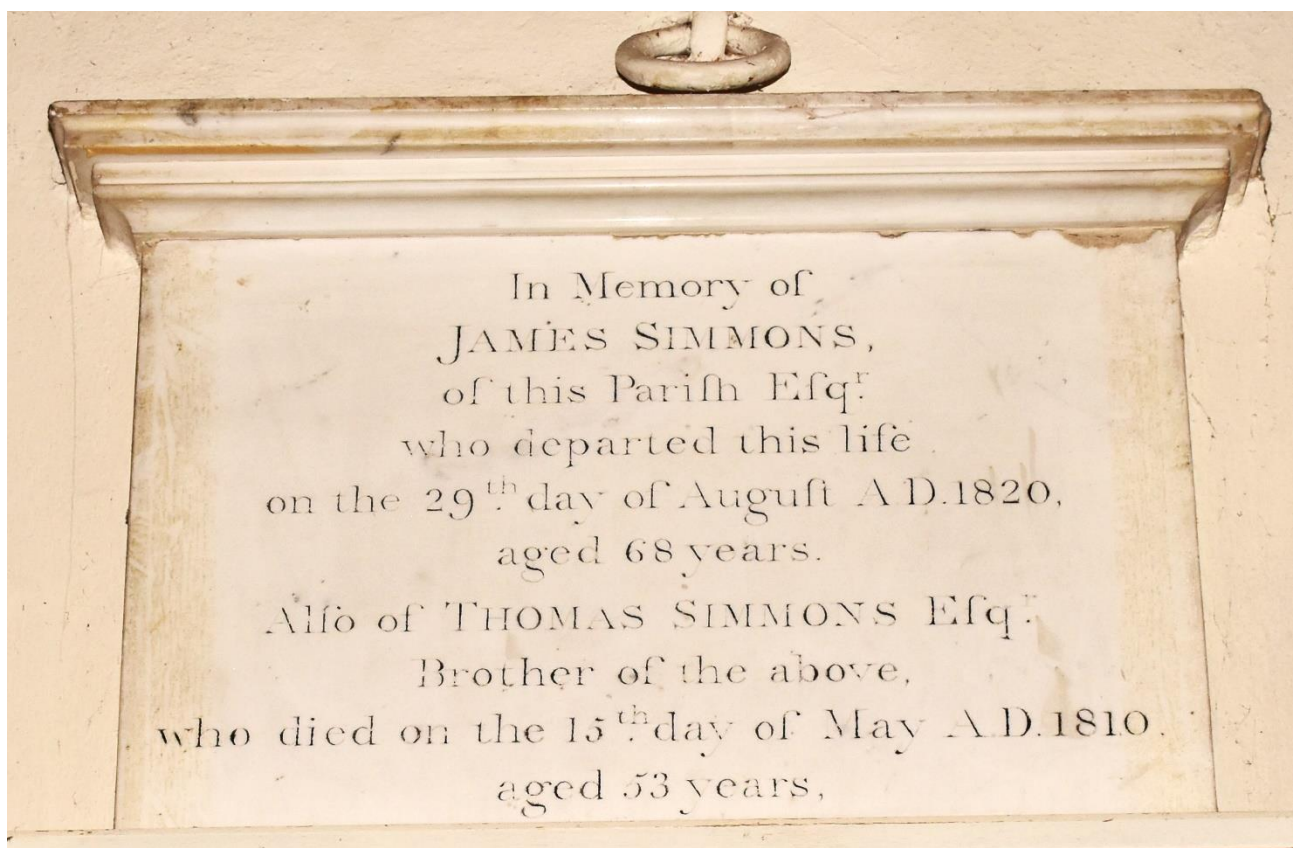


Fig 18: Close up of plaque.

THE PORCH



Fig 19: Doorway in the northwest corner leading to the staircase giving access to the church roof.

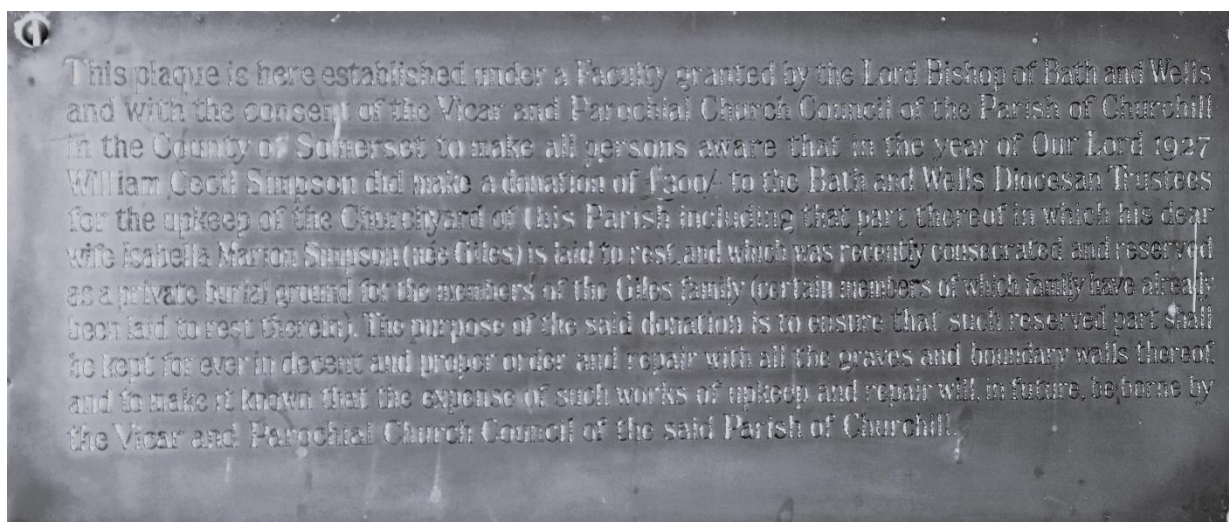


Fig 20: Plaque to left of doorway.

This reads:

This plaque is here established under a Faculty granted by the Lord Bishop of Bath and Wells / and with consent of the Vicar and Parochial Church Council of the Parish of Churchill/ in the County of Somerset to make all persons aware that in the year of Our Lord 1927/ William Cecil Simpson did make a donation of £300 to the Bath and Wells Diocesan Trustees / for the upkeep of the Churchyard of this Parish including the part thereof in which his dear wife / Isabella Marion Simpson (nee Giles) is laid to rest and which was recently consecrated and reserved / as a private burial ground for the members of the Giles family (certain members of which family have already / been laid to rest therein). The purpose of the said donation is to ensure that such reserved part shall / be kept forever in decent and proper order and repair with all the graves and boundary walls thereof / and to make it known that the expense of such works of upkeep and repair, will in future, be borne by / the Vicar and Parochial Church Council of the said Parish of Churchill.

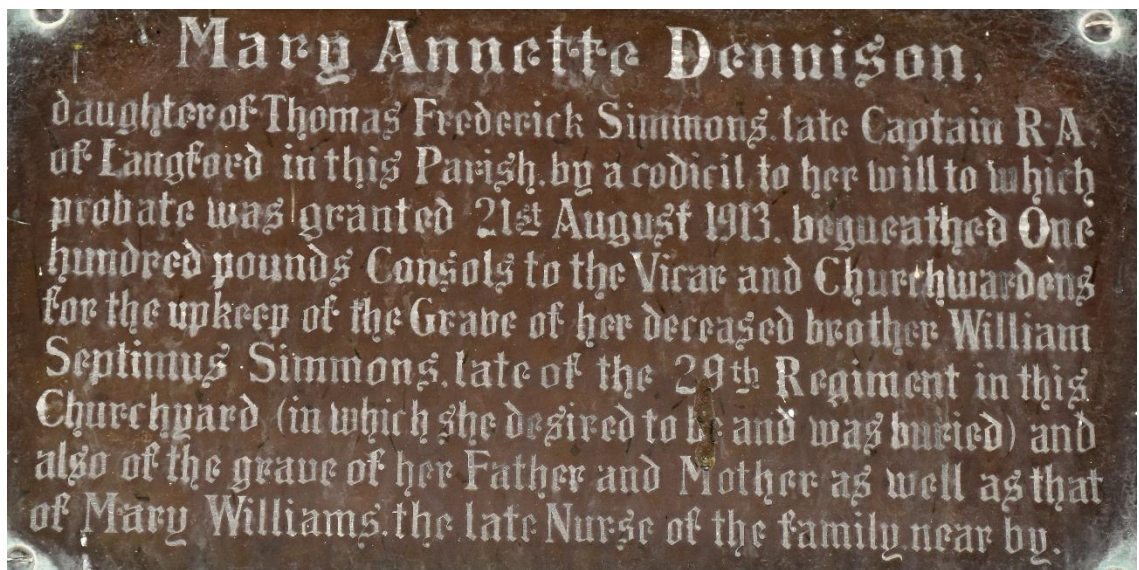


Fig 21: Plaque on east wall

This reads:

Mary Annette Dennison
 daughter of Thomas Frederick Simmons late Captain R A
 of Langford in this Parish by a codicil to her will to which
 probate was granted 21st August 1913 bequeathed One
 hundred pounds Consols to the Vicar and Churchwardens
 for the upkeep of the Grave of her deceased brother William
 Septimus Simmons late of the 29th Regiment in this
 Churchyard (in which she desired to be and was buried) and
 also of the grave of her Father and Mother as well as that
 of Mary Williams the late Nurse of the family near by



Fig 22: Plaque over south door.

The text is:

(T)he Incorporated Society
 for Building & Churches
 GRANTED £35 AD 1878, TOWARDS
 RESEATING AND RESTORING THIS CHURCH
 ALL THE SEATS ARE FOR THE FREE USE
 OF THE PARISHIONERS ACCORDING TO
 LAW



Fig 23: Plaque over the inner door.

Knight (1915) records

'Painted on a board fastened over the inner door of the church porch is the following list of the -

BENEFACTIONS OF THE PARISH

OF CHURCHILL.

(1).—John Latch, of the Middle Temple, London, Esq., Son of Thomas Latch of this Parish, by his will dated A.D. 1655, directed a sum of money at the Discretion of his Executors, to be laid out in the Purchase of Land, to give forever a Charitable Dole amongst 33 Impotent or Deserving Poor of the Parish to be applied as follows, viz., 33 12dy Wheaten Loaves and 12d in money with each Loaf on every Christmas Day.

(2).—Mrs. Mary Plumley sister of the above named John Latch by her Will Dated 14th October, 1672, Directed 80l. to be laid out in Lands, the yearly Rents and Profits to be applied as follows, viz., 40s. to be Paid to some able Minister for preaching two Sermons yearly on Christmas Day and Good Friday. A Communion being celebrated that Day for the Poor and such others as should come to Communicate. The rest of the money arising out of the Rents to be given amongst such of the Poor People of the Parish as shall yearly come to Church in the manner following, viz., to each poor Body a 12dy Wheaten Loaf and a 12d. in money as far as the same may extend according to the discretion of her Executors and the Churchwardens.

(3). Thomas Watts, of this Parish, Gent., by Indenture Dated 26th April, 1710, Granted Rent Charge of 50s. on Certain Lands at Banwell to be Paid annually on the Saturday next before the second Day of February one moiety of the said 50s. to be Distributed in Bread the other in money to 25 poor Householders who shall not Receive Alms of the Parish at the discretion of his Executors, Their Heirs, the Churchwardens and the owners of the Land on which the said 50s. stands charged.

(4).—James Simmons, of Langford in the Parish of Churchill, Esq. (Great Grandson of the above named Mrs. Mary Plumley) by his will Dated the 6th of April, 1820, Directed his Executor to Convey Middle Common in the said Parish containing 3 Acres and 24 Perches to Trustees, the Rents and Profits to be Applied Instructing 8 Poor Children of the said Parish to Read the Bible.'

Porch effigies.

Collinson (1791), records that the effigies were at the east end of south aisle but spent some time in the churchyard.



Fig 24: The male effigy on the east side of the porch (Scale 4 x 50 cm).

This 5-foot 8-inch (1.773 metre) effigy, made from Dundry Hill stone and dating to circa 1300, may relate to Roger de Churchill who lived in the reign of Edward I. It is broken off below the knee.

His head, turned towards the right, rests on two large cushions and is in a round-headed coif of mail. The effigy wears a hauberk¹ and hose of mail.² The figure also wears a warm sleeveless outdoor coat and a waist belt and ridged knee caps of cuir-bouilli.³

The left leg is crossed over the right and his hands, raised in prayer, are in metal gauntlets and the figure has a studded sword belt.

This once fine effigy is sadly mutilated and weather worn. The mail has all disappeared and scuff marks all over the effigy show signs of enthusiastic, but perhaps injudicial, stripping of paint or other surface covering in the past.

¹ *A tunic of chain mail worn as defensive armour from the 12th to the 14th century*

² *a cloth leg covering*

³ *Leather softened by soaking, pressed, molded, or stamped to shape, and hardened by drying and used for armour.*



Fig 25: Close up of effigy (camera flash image showing a more accurate colour).



Fig 26: Effigy from a different angle.(with available (winter) sky light, hence the blue image).



Fig 27: The head.



Fig 28: Close up of top half of figure.



Fig 29: Close up of shield.



Fig 30: Graffiti on the shield.

A "b" is clear but what of the rest?

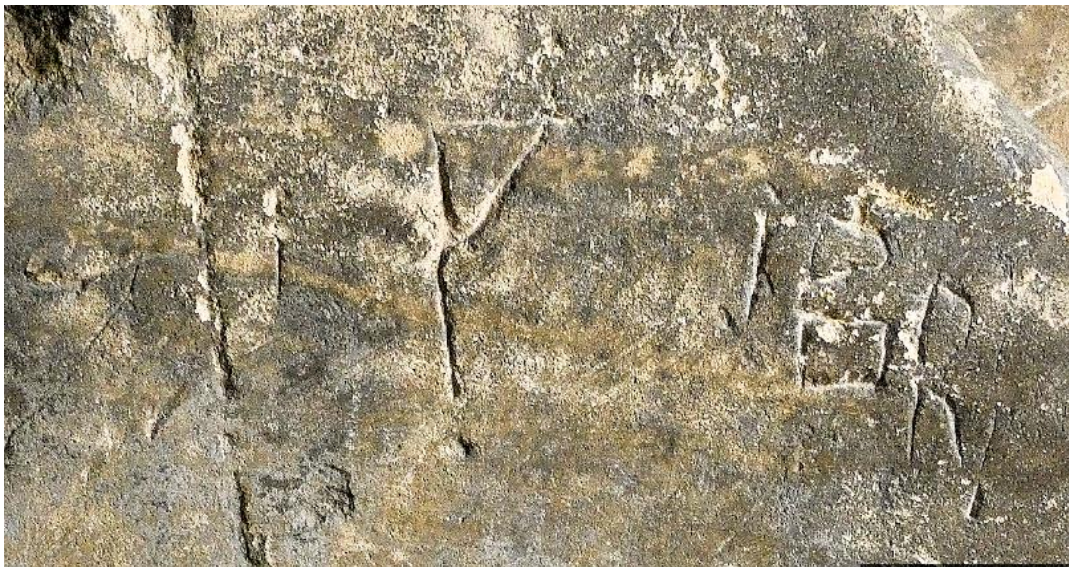


Fig 31: Graffiti on the shield.

Does it read Y J B R ?



Fig 32: Effigy of unknown lady.

This effigy of an unknown lady dated circa 1300, who was probably a member of the Fitzpayne family.

The figure is in a long dress (kirtle) with tight-fitting sleeves, sleeveless cote-hardie. ¹ Her cloak (mantle) is fastened in front by fermailles ² and on her head is a wimple. ³

Her kerchief falls in graceful folds below the shoulders. The face is mutilated and the hands are broken and have been raised in prayer.

Her head rests on a cushion and there are two reclining angels on either side of head. The left is destroyed and the right mutilated. The left hand rests on a cushion and the feet rest on a dog.

The effigy and slab measures 6ft. 7ins. (2.01m) by 1ft. 9ins (53.34 cm) by 2ins (5.08cm) and is made from a block of Dundry stone.

¹ *A long sleeved garment usually full length (for women). It was made to fit closely by buttoning or lacing.*

² *A medieval clasp.*

³ *A cloth covering worn over the head and around the neck and chin.*



Fig 33: Upper section of figure.



Fig 34: The full length of the effigy.



Fig 35: Close up of the dog at her feet.



Fig 36: The inner south door.

The inner south door is deeply moulded with hoodmould, angel stops and C19 two-leaf plank door.



Fig 37: The angel stops.

The tie-beam roof is set on angel corbels.



Fig 38: The roof corbels., some with carved shields relating to the Passion of Christ (ladder, pierced hands and heart etc).



Fig 39: Close ups of two corbels.

OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

EAST END



Fig 40: The east end of the church.

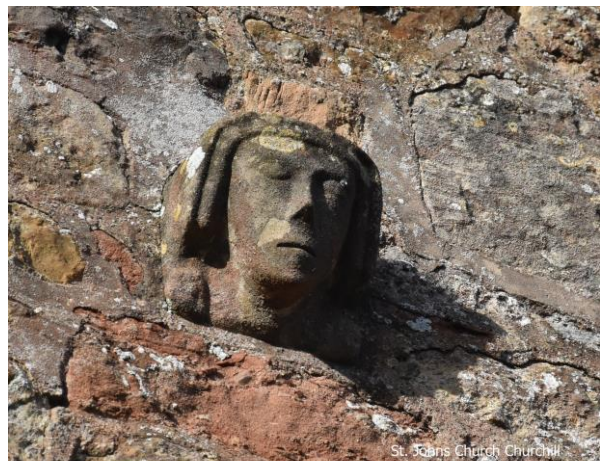


Fig 41: The top of the east end (above) and (right) a close up of a carved head above the east window.

NORTH SIDE



Fig 42: Location of gargoyle indicated by the yellow arrow.



Fig 43: Close up of gargoyle.

Gargoyles serve to drain water off the roof through its mouth. Because of the alterations to Churchill church in the 19th century the function of some gargoyles has changed.

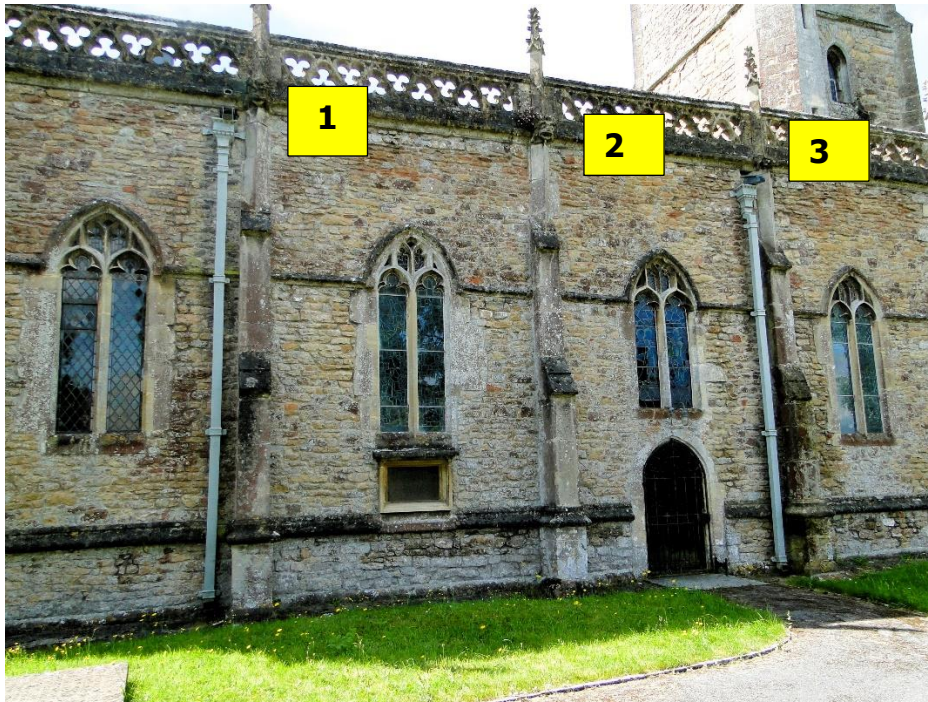


Fig 44: North side centre.

The yellow numbers indicate the position of the figures below.

1)



Fig 45: The first gargoyle.

1879 on the rainwater pipe refers to a church renovation date.

2)



Fig 46: The second gargoyle.



Fig 47: Gargoyle 2 from another angle.

3)



Fig 48: The third gargoyle.



Fig 49: The north door.

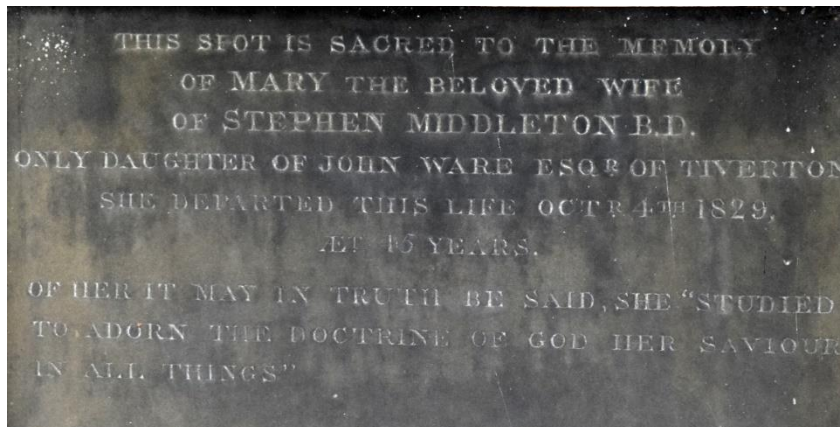


Fig 50: Above - location of plaque. Below - close up.

The inscription reads:

THIS SPOT IS SACRED TO THE MEMORY
 OF MARY THE BELOVED WIFE
 OF STEPHEN MIDDLETON B.D.
 ONLY DAUGHTER OF JOHN WARE ESQ^R OF TIVERTON
 SHE DEPARTED THIS LIFE OCT^R 4TH 1829
 ÆT 45 YEARS
 IN HER IT MAY IN TRUTH BE SAID, SHE "SHE STUDIED
 TO ADORN THE DOCTRINE OF GOD HER SAVIOUR
 IN ALL THINGS"

SOUTH SIDE



Fig 51: A 'Hunky Punk' on the extreme west side of the south aisle (Indicated by the red arrow above).

A 'Hunky Punk' is said to relate to the words haunches and *punchy* ('short-legged'). It is a decorative, grotesque carving usually of a squatting animal. They are especially numerous on Somerset churches.



Fig 52: Stone (indicated by the red arrow) on the west side of the newel stair, leading to the roof of the south aisle. This contains an inverted sun dial.



Fig 53: The inverted sun dial may be a tide dial (to show the tides of the day and the approximate times for the saying of mass.

Collinson (1791) records 'The 'Sunn-dyall,' put up on the porch in the reign of Charles II, has disappeared.'

The sundial shown in Fig 53 above is an early medieval type. It has been built upside down, 5 feet (1.52m) from the ground into a later wall. The gnomon has gone but its hole can be seen at the bottom of the stone.

Walker (1949) suggests it possibly may be from the early Norman chapel.



Fig 54. The tomb slab and above its location indicated by the red arrow.

Built into the west wall of the porch is this tomb slab. Its inscription has been lost.

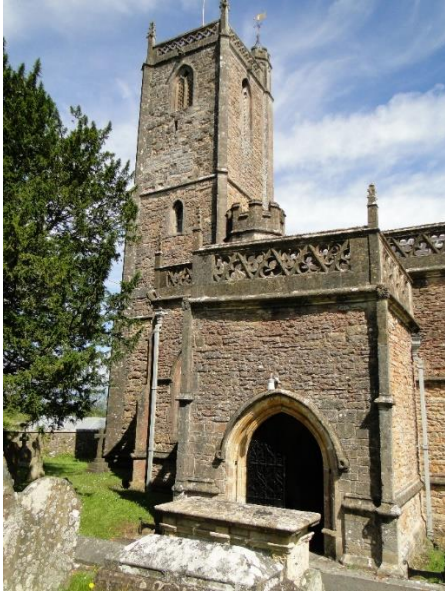


Fig 55: Entrance to the porch (above) with close up below.

The deeply moulded pointed-arched doorway with hoodmould has a 19th century, wrought iron 2-leaf gate.

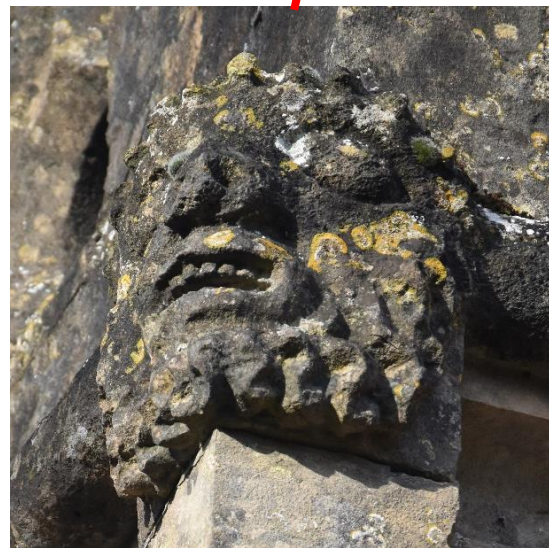


Fig 56: Grotesques at the top of the porch with locations indicated by red arrows.

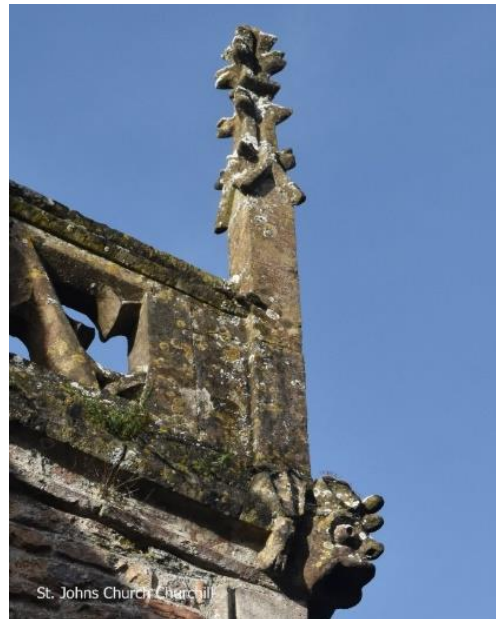


Fig 57: Gargoyle with its location indicated by the red arrow on the upper picture.



Fig 58: Two close ups.



Fig 59: 'Hunky Punk' with its location indicated by the red arrow on the picture above.



Fig 60: Another 'Hunky Punk' with its location indicated by the red arrow in the picture above.

THE TOWER



Fig 61: The west side of the tower.

Foyle and Pevsner (2011) state that the 3-stage tower perhaps dates to circa 1420 to 1450.

Knight (1915) records that:

` In the tower hang five musical bells, one of them very old, and probably cast before the Reformation. They are inscribed:

1. ALTHOUGH : MY : WAISE : IS : SMALL : I : WILL : BE : HEARD
 A : MAINGST : YOV : ALL : SING : ON : MY : IOLLY : SISTERS
 ED : BILBIE : CAST : ME MR : IOHN: JENNINGS CHURCHWARDEN 1722.
2. T.MEARS OF LONDON FECIT 1812
- 3 Santa Maria T. G. It also bears a mark, found on many early bells dedicated to some saint. The initials T.G. refer to some unknown bell-founder, who is believed to have flourished before the year 1500.
- 4 T : MEARS : OF : LONDON : FECIT : 1812
- 5 SING : PRAISE : TO : GOD : MR : IOHN :
 BABER : CHURCHWARDEN : 1725 : MY :
 SOUND : IS : GOOD RIGHT : UNDERSTOOD :
 FOR : THOMAS : BILBIE : CASTED : ME :
 PLAINLY : DOTH : APPEAR'

The church guide suggests a date of 1520 to 1530 for the oldest bell. It also records a sixth bell - a treble donated by Mr Sidney Hill in 1908. In addition, it states that the bells dated 1812 were recast in 1879 and 1908 and the 1725 bell was recast in 1938. In 1908 the original bell cage was replaced.



Fig 62: A closer view of the west side of the tower.



Fig 63: Gargoyle at the top of the tower



Fig 64: The two-light window at the top of the tower.



Fig 65: The bell stage with a single light opening.



Fig 66: A statuary niche with crocked canopy and shield below.



Fig 67: The three - light C19 window in original C15 surround.



Fig 68: The pointed-arched doorway with C19 window set in it.



Fig 69: The north side of the tower with gargoyle, the position indicated by the red arrow.



Fig 70: Close up of the north side gargoyle.



Fig 71: The position of the south side gargoyle indicated by the red arrow (above) and close up of the gargoyle below.



Fig 72: Above - the position of gargoyle on the east side of the tower (indicated by the red arrow) and below a close-up of the gargoyle.



Fig 73: The lychgate.

The lychgate dates to 1908 and was renovated in 1946 and 1964.

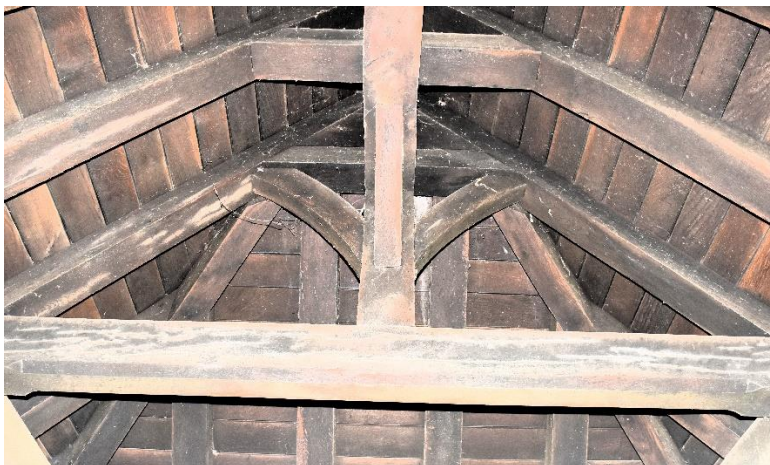


Fig 74: The lychgate roof.

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